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THE OLD ART UNION.

—FIRST PAPER.—

THE American Art Union, founded in 1838, and discontinued in 1852, was one of the greatest influences in the upbuilding and strengthening of American Art which ever existed in this country, and probably did more for the popularization of art than has any other agency up to the present time. Mr. Tuckerman, in the *Introduction* of his *Book of the Artists*, thus writes of the Art Union :

The Art Union represented and promoted the Art interests of the country. Characteristic of the age, it emphatically exhibited the alliance between luxury and work, society and culture ; the fusion of interests and influences so peculiar to modern civilization, it emphatically marked the era when Art, emancipated from the care of Kings and Popes, might find sustenance by alliance with commerce and the people. Originated by a French amateur, the *Société des Amis des Arts* soon became a popular model. Artists are proverbially inexpert in affairs ; academies are proverbially jealous of their privileges ; and, therefore, the facilities which Art Unions yield, both to the artists who desire an eligible market for their productions, and for purchasers whose tasteful enthusiasm outruns their means, were at once recognized and adopted. The Art Union of Berlin was essentially promoted by Humboldt ; that of Bremen boasts a fine edifice ; in Prague, Vienna and Düsseldorf, these institutions "for the purchase of pictures to be disposed of by lot" have been remarkably efficient, both in developing artistic talent, and in distributing works of merit. In London, a few years ago, [this was written in 1867—E.D.] the annual subscriptions reached a hundred thousand dollars. The American Art Union was established in 1838, and for more than ten years was a most successful medium for the direct encouragement of native art ; its income reached the sum mentioned as that of the London subscriptions ; it annually distributed from five hundred to more than a thousand works of art ; it published a series of popular engravings from American pictures, and during several years issued a *Bulletin*, wherein much valuable criticism, a complete record of the artistic achievements in this country, and a large amount of interesting information as to the art and artists of Europe, were embodied for immediate satisfaction and future reference. Several American artists, who have since achieved high and prosperous careers, were first substantially encouraged, and their claims made patent by the seasonable commissions of the Art Union. After a brief period of eminent service, the institution was broken up on account of the alleged violation its course offered to the lottery prohibitions of the State law. Perhaps it ceased at a time when its best work had been accomplished, and when American art had acquired enough native impulse and self reliance to flourish without such extraneous support ; but, in the retrospect of our brief artistic annals, the Art Union marks a period of fresh progress and assured prosperity.

The Art Union was originally known as "The Apollo Association," and was founded January 8th, 1838—less than a year after the formation of the Art Union of London. As nearly as can be ascertained, James Herring, a portrait painter, who, in conjunction with James B. Longacre, of Philadelphia, had achieved considerable prominence from the preparation and publication of *The National Portrait Gallery of Prominent Americans*, was the originator of the project. Mr. Herring assumed the rent of the headquarters of the Apollo Association for the first year of its existence, and labored indefatigably to advance its interests.

The preamble of the constitution of the Apollo Association contains this interesting matter (the italics being ours) :

Although there undoubtedly exists, in the United States, a more general admiration and love for the arts than in any other country, yet there are great numbers of persons who have cultivated a taste for the refined enjoy-

ments of art, who are not always able to indulge in the expense of forming collections for themselves ; and it is certain that the artists, with few exceptions, who devote themselves with enthusiasm to the production of works of the highest class, have not an efficient support. If, therefore, no steps are taken to counteract the unfortunate results which must necessarily follow, many artists of fine abilities must either engage in less precarious walks of their profession, or struggle on against adversities.

Under these circumstances, and with the view of effecting, by mutual co-operation, what might be beyond the reach of individual resources, it is proposed to found an association—similar to those now in successful operation in London and Edinburgh, for the purchase of works of art—which, being based upon principles that neither bear hard upon individuals, nor interfere with private purchases, will, from its extent, produce a large annual fund, and at the same time give an adequate return in value to its supporters.

The "object" of the Apollo Association, in brief, was the patronage of artists and the cultivation of the people, by means of a periodical exhibition of the works of good artists, a permanent gallery, and the annual purchase of American works of art to be distributed among the members of the association.

The necessary funds were to be provided by the receipts of the exhibitions—which were to be free to members only—and by annual subscriptions of five dollars, each subscriber becoming a member of the association for the year, having free admission to the exhibition for himself and family, and having a vote in the deliberations of the association. The subscriber might indicate also, whether his subscription was to be devoted to the purchase of pictures for distribution or for the permanent gallery, which latter seemed to be one of the principal features in the scheme of Mr. Herring. The whole amount of the subscriptions was to be devoted—after the necessary deduction for expenses—to the purchase of pictures from the exhibition for the permanent collection, or for distribution among the subscribers ; the Board of Managers, however, reserving the privilege of expending such portion of the fund as they considered proper, for the production of engravings of works worthy of the distinction, said engravings to be distributed among the subscribers.

A general meeting of the members of the association was to be held each year, in December, for the distribution by lot, among the subscribers, of the pictures purchased for the purpose, and for the election of a "Committee of Managers," to serve during the ensuing year. The Committee of Managers was to consist of fifteen gentlemen (not artists), a President, Secretary and Treasurer. This committee was to have full power to purchase what might appear to its members the most deserving works exhibited in the Apollo Gallery ;—such works only, however, as had been painted in America, or by American artists who were abroad. In the month following the annual distribution, the Committee of Management was to publish an Annual Report, showing the condition of the society, the work accomplished during its past year, explaining the principles which guided the committee in the selection of the works purchased for distribution, and entering into such other details as might appear proper.

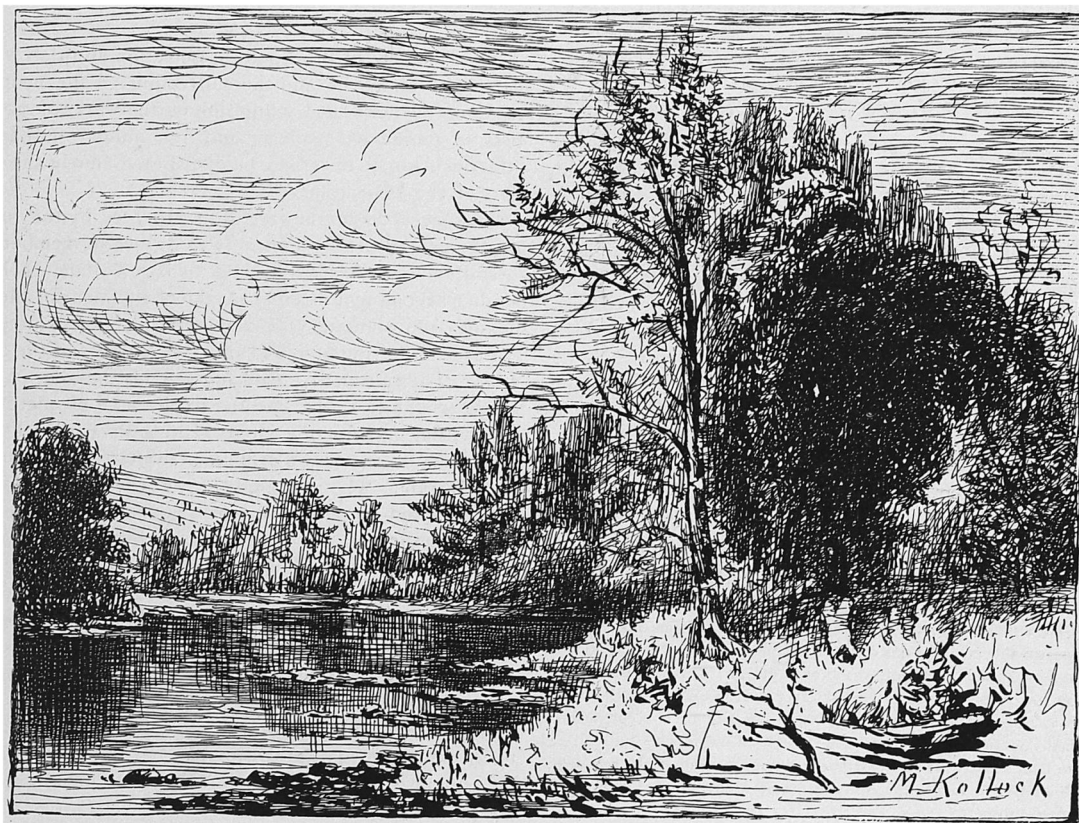
The first general meeting of the Apollo Association was held January 16, 1839, when the following Committee of

Management was elected: John W. Francis, M.D., (President); F. W. Edmonds, (Treasurer); Benjamin Nathan, (Recording Secretary); James Herring, (Corresponding Secretary); Philip Hone, James Watson Webb, J. P. Ridner, J. P. Nesmith, Augustus Greele, John H. Austen, William L. Morris, William Kemble, T. N. Campbell, Aaron S. Thompson, George Bruce, Duncan C. Pell, E. Parmlly and Prosper M. Wetmore.

In December, 1839, the first distribution of pictures occurred—thirty-six paintings being then given to the

Sully (\$50), to H. H. Schieffelin; "Ship Riding Out on a Gale," by Thomas Birch (\$40), to Prosper M. Wetmore; "Charles I. in the Studio of Van Dyck," by C. Verbruyck (\$125), to A. Averill, and "Three Regular Old Bruisers," by James H. Beard—then of Cincinnati—(\$20), to J. A. Dorr.

There were 814 subscribers in 1839, and the receipts amounted, in all, to \$4,200. There was no engraving published that year. The gallery of the association was located in the old Clinton Hall building, at Nassau and



SUMMER ON RONDOUT CREEK—BY M. KOLLOCK—(DRAWN BY THE ARTIST.)

IN THE ART UNION EXHIBITION.

subscribers. Among these pictures may be mentioned: "A Landscape in Early Autumn," by Thomas Doughty, purchased by the association for \$250—given to L. Rawdon; "Landscape—Contrast between Firelight and Moonlight," by Daniel Huntington (\$150), to the Rev. Dr. Milnor; "The First Ship Discovered Approaching the American Continent," by J. G. Chapman (\$135), to Philo T. Ruggles; "Interior of the Ducal Palace, Florence," by G. Cooke (\$125), to William Cullen Bryant; "Mallards," by J. W. Audobon (\$110), to Elijah Paine; "Indian Girl," by R. M.

Beekman Streets, and it there remained until 1841, when it was removed to the "Granite Building," Broadway and Chambers Street.

There were few subscribers for the benefit of the permanent gallery, and it was feared that the mere purchase of a few pictures and their distribution by lot, would be so much like a lottery as to be offensive to many citizens, if not to the laws;—that the association would be sustained by a spirit of gambling rather than a love of art, and that in this case it could not be highly useful nor hope for contin-

ued success. It was accordingly determined, therefore, after one year's experience, to submit the institution to the Legislature, with a request that it might have the sanction of the law. This was given by an act of incorporation, in 1840. It was also determined that after a suitable amount of the funds should be invested in paintings for distribution, an engraving should be produced, of which a copy should be given to every member.

The association met with indifferent success in 1840; there were only 686 subscribers, and the receipts only amounted to \$3,927. Fourteen pictures were distributed among the subscribers, and there was given to each member a mezzotint, by John Sartain, from a painting by John B. White, of Charleston, S. C., representing "General Marion Inviting a British Officer to Dinner."

In 1841 affairs were still worse. Though the number of subscribers had increased to 937, and the receipts to \$5,205, it was only possible to provide six pictures, and a "Bust of Sir Walter Scott, by C. B. Ives, after Chantry," for distribution. A mezzotint, "The Artist's Dream," after a painting by Comeys, was given to the subscribers. Meanwhile, the expenses of the association had increased greatly, while the subscriptions had not increased in relative proportion. The Committee of Managers was discouraged, and at the next annual meeting, with two or three exceptions, refused to be re-elected. In the election which followed, Daniel Stanton was made President of the association, Andrew Warner, Recording Secretary; John P. Ridner, Corresponding Secretary, and W. H. Johnson, Treasurer. Among other members of the new committee were William Cullen Bryant, Jonathan Sturges, John H. Gourlie, Erastus C. Benedict, Prosper M. Wetmore, John A. Austen and Daniel Elliot. The new committee resolved to abandon the exhibition—which, in the past year, had cost \$2,000 more than its receipts—and also to discontinue the subscriptions to a permanent gallery, which, in three years, had amounted only to \$150. Office rent was stopped, and the committee held its meetings in the book-store of Mr. Francis. Each member of the committee for 1842 pledged himself to secure a certain number of new subscribers by personal solicitation, and it was determined to give to the subscribers a fine line steel engraving, instead of a mezzotint print. This year there were 1,120 subscribers, the receipts were \$5,883, and thirty-five paintings were distributed. The engraving given to the subscribers was by A. B. Durand, after Vanderlyn's painting, "Caius Marius on the Ruins of Carthage," which had received the first prize—a gold medal—at one of the annual exhibitions of the French Academy during the time of the First Napoleon, who tendered to the young American artist his personal congratulations upon its merit.

The success of the Art Union really dated from this time. The members of the new Committee of Managers took deep personal interest in the work of extending the list of subscribers, and securing for the annual distribution the best paintings obtainable. In 1843 the result of their labors was shown; the subscription list had increased to

1,452, and the receipts to \$7,129. Fifty-one pictures and five equestrian statuettes of Washington, cast by Kneeland, were distributed. Each subscriber was given a steel engraving, by Alfred Jones, after the painting, "Farmers Noonning," by W. S. Mount. This year the association employed an agent to visit the principal cities and towns in the country, to explain the objects of the society and to solicit subscriptions. In the *Transactions* of the association, published at the close of the year, was a small mezzotint, representing the large engraving to be given to the subscribers for 1844. This feature was incorporated into all of the future numbers of the *Transactions*.

In 1844 the Apollo Association had its name changed, by legislative enactment, and thereafter was known as "THE AMERICAN ART UNION." This year William Cullen Bryant was elected President—in which capacity he served the union for three years—and the prosperity of the association continued to increase in such degree, that before the end of the year, the public gallery was reopened at No. 322 Broadway. There were 2,080 subscribers in 1844, and the receipts were \$10,081. Ninety-two paintings were distributed among the subscribers, and each subscriber received a fine engraving, by Alfred Jones, after a painting by F. W. Edmonds, entitled "Sparkling," and an outline etching, "The Escape of Captain Wharton," by Hoppin.

In 1845 the number of subscribers increased to 3,233, and the receipts came up to \$16,165. Each subscriber received an engraving from the painting by A. B. Durand, "The Capture of Major Andre," and one hundred and fifteen paintings were distributed. In 1846 there was the same steady increase in subscriptions and receipts, the former numbering 4,457 and the latter amounting to \$22,293. The engraving for the year was from Leutze's painting, "Sir Walter Raleigh Parting from his Wife," and one hundred and forty-six paintings were given among the subscribers.

In 1847 both the subscriptions and receipts of the previous year were more than doubled. There were 9,666 subscribers, and \$48,734 passed into the treasury of the Union. More capacious quarters for the gallery and offices of the Art Union were secured this year, at No. 497 Broadway. Two fine steel engravings were given to each subscriber; one of them, "A Sybil," engraved by J. W. Casilear, from the painting by D. Huntington, and the other, "The Jolly Flat Boatman," engraved by Doney, from a painting by G. C. Bingham. Two hundred and seventy-two paintings were distributed, besides fifty Art Union medals, in silver, commemorating Washington Allston, and two hundred and fifty medals in bronze from the same dies. These medals were the first of a series designed to represent the leading American artists.

In 1848, the number of subscribers and the amount of the receipts again nearly doubled those of the year before. There were 16,475 subscribers, and the receipts were \$85,134. This year the Union transformed its semi-monthly catalogue into a semi-monthly *Bulletin*, which contained the prospectus of the Union, a descriptive catalogue of the pictures exhibited in its galleries, and various other

matters of interest. The engravings of the year were "Queen Mary Signing the Death Warrant of Lady Jane Gray," after a painting by D. Huntington, and an outline etching of "Rip Van Winkle," by F. O. C. Darley. Four hundred and fifty-four paintings, two hundred and four sets of the Art Union engravings for the previous years, and two hundred and fifty of the Allston medals were distributed among the subscribers.

In 1849—the best year of the Art Union—there were 18,960 subscribers, and the receipts were \$96,300. The semi-monthly *Bulletin* became a monthly, was greatly enlarged, and made to partake of the nature of an art journal. It contained essays, poems, foreign correspondence, biographical sketches of the artists, and art articles of a general nature, besides a number of steel engravings and woodcuts. Among the steel engravings were representations of "The Wages of War," by Henry Peters Gray—a painting now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art; "The Attainder of Strafford," by E. Leutze, and "The Three Marys at the Sepulchre," by D. Huntington. The Art Union this year purchased a piece of real estate in Broadway, and erected a new art gallery. The subscribers for 1849 received a fine steel engraving, by James Smillie, from Thomas Cole's "Youth"—from the "Voyage of Life" series of paintings, which had been distributed by the Art Union the previous year—and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," by F. O. C. Darley. There were 1,010 works of art distributed among the subscribers, including 460 paintings, 20 bronze statuettes, by H. K. Brown, ("Choosing the Arrow,") 500 Art Union medals commemorating Gilbert Stuart, and 30 portfolios of Art Union engravings.

This brings the History of the old Art Union up to 1850. The association enjoyed two more successful years, and then was dissolved. An account of the last days of the Union, and the causes which led to its dissolution, will be given in a future paper.

OUT OF TOWN EXHIBITIONS.

One of the objects of the formation of the American Art Union was that the society should be the medium between the several exhibition associations of the country and the artists, to conduct negotiations that might be mutually advantageous—to furnish such associations meritorious collections of pictures without giving them the trouble of dealing with individual artists, and on the other hand, to obtain for the artists guarantees of sales to an amount proportionate to the number and value of the pictures exhibited. In this respect, the late Southern Exposition, at Louisville, Ky., was pre-eminently successful, and that city can now point to the possession of a collection of fifteen pictures as a nucleus of a public art gallery. This result was brought about through the mediumship of the American Art Union, as detailed in *THE ART UNION* for January.

Correspondence is requested from friends of art who may wish to hold exhibitions in their several cities during the coming year.

Negotiations are now pending with the San Francisco Art Association for the loan of a collection of Art Union pictures, on a basis of the same nature as that made with the Louisville Exposition Art Committee—which resulted so advantageously to the citizens of Louisville, the artists, and the Art Union.

E. WOOD PERRY, Jr., Secretary,
42 East 14th Street, New York City.

The Art Union's Galleries are open every day from 9 A. M. to 6 P. M.

COMMUNICATIONS.

Under this heading will be published communications relative to art matters, which may be addressed to the Editor. In each case, the name and address of the writer must accompany the contribution, though not necessarily for publication.

A QUESTION.

To the Editor of THE ART UNION:

SIR:—I would like to get a direct answer to one question which has been evaded by every writer who has advocated the Free Art movement, as it is the basis of all of the arguments of the art tariff men. It is this: If the duties on pictures are removed, how will it be possible for a resident artist to support himself, if in consequence of the duties on every item of his expenses it costs him twice as much to paint a picture, as it costs a foreign resident to produce one, both being of the same size and degree of artistic merit? Could an American made piano compete with a foreign made one of the same quality that was manufactured at half its cost? To say, "let the American make twice as valuable work as the foreigner," is simply begging the question, as it removes the competition from the same common plane, and really requires the American producer to give twice as much for the same money as the foreigner.

I would like to have some of our Free Art writers advocate free books. Why are they all so quiet about that item of the tariff bill?

W.

THE BELMONT ART BILL.

To the Editor of THE ART UNION:

SIR:—For a movement that pretends to be the outcome of a generous and universal sympathy for art, the Free Art bill recently introduced into Congress is indeed a singular one.

There would seem to be a method in the apparently loose manner in which the bill is drawn;—if not, how can its provisions be explained when one reads between the lines and finds that only "statues of marble or other stone" are to be admitted free, while statues and other art work in terra cotta, bronze, or other metals, which are much more intimately connected with the artist's own hand, are to be taxed;—thus a group by Benvenuto Cellini, the beautiful bronze work of the Japanese, of Barbedienne—the gold work of Castellani, etc., etc., are subjected to heavy duties for the benefit of our already wealthy metal founders, jewelers, *et al.* Likewise for the benefit of our engraving companies, etchings and engravings are to be taxed, while photographs, which are purely mechanical productions, are put on the free list.

Again, to favor our potters, the works of ceramic art from the time of Lucca della Robbia to the modern Sèvres or Faience, are to be heavily taxed—and the same unjust discrimination is to be made against the numberless art works in ivory, wood, glass, and the textile fabrics.

If indeed we are to have this new departure, let it be a thorough one, and let the bill include all works of art, whatever may be the material of which they are made.

Z.